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ABSTRACT

A case study is presented of a course for experienced tertiary teachers at the University of New South Wales. The course, "Learning and Teaching," was a compulsory part of a masters program for those involved in teaching the health professions. Classroom events were used to identify and illustrate some general principles of adult learning and to encourage a fuller understanding of how undergraduates approach courses, teachers, and learning tasks. The significance of the first class meeting, assessment, the role of emotions in learning, teacher dependency, and methods of monitoring teaching and learning are discussed. It is concluded that this case study taught the instructor much about his teaching style and its effects on students, and that courses with little structure and no well-defined aims and objectives can still succeed. Appendices include a student form for assessing the course, the instructor/author's impressions of the course, and an evaluation of the course by two students. (Author/PHR)

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TERTIARY TEACHERS LEARNING ABOUT LEARNING:

A CASE STUDY OF CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

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October, 1977

HE 011 638

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ABSTRACT

A case study will be presented of a course for experienced tertiary teache·s in which an attempt was made to use classroom events to identi·y and illuminate some general principles of adult learning and to encourage a fuller understanding of how undergraduates approa:h courses, teachers and learning tasks. Topics considered includ3d the significance of the first meeting, assessment, the role c f emotions in learning, teacher dependency, and methods of monitoring teaching and learning.

NOTE: This paper was presented to the ANZAAS Congress, Melbourne, August 1977.

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents a case study of a University course and the contributions and reactions to it of the teacher (myself) and the students. The course was intended to meet two sets of aims: those relating to the students' learning and those relating to the research interests of the teacher. Although these overlap to some extent I shall try to treat them separately.

The Course. Entitled "Learning and Teaching" it comprised a compulsory strand in a one year master's degree programme for those engaged in teaching for the health professions. The timetable provided for a weekly two-hour class from 8-10 a.m. for the fourteen weeks of the first semester of the programme. The course had not been taught previously and was graded on a pass/fail basis, as was the entire programme. The official course description was the following:

> This course will focus primarily on theoretical and practical aspects of human learning. Recent research on skill and concept acquisition, problem-solving, memory, and motivation will be reviewed. Consideration will be given to the effects of cultural and emotional factors in learning. There will be an emphasis throughout on the skills required to identify and analyze the differences between individuals in their approach to a variety of learning tasks. A secondary focus will be the nature of the connections between learning and teaching and the development of an ability to devise teaching procedures and environments which are appropriate to specific learning tasks.

The Students. There were eleven of them, all experienced senior teachers. Three came from the Pacific region with WHO support and were full-time students; the remainder came from Australia and were part-time, returning to their own professional responsibilities after each class. All but two were qualified in medicine or dentistry. Most had post-graduate qualifications in their own specialities but none had any formal qualifications in the field of education. The part-time students, in addition to their professional responsibilities, were also doing another course in the degree programme and were thus extremely busy and very much aware of the demands on their time. The overseas students had also made considerable sacrifices, professionally and financially, in order to undertake the programme. They were all highly motivated and anxious to gain as much as possible from the course, although most of them were naturally keen to acquire skills and knowledge which would have an immediate application to their professional work.

Aims of the Course. The "official" outline of the course was invented mainly in order to satisfy University requirements for a course description; when I drafted it, and that was done very quickly indeed, I was very far from clear as to what the course would be about beyond the intention that it would deal with aspects of adult learning and attempt to relate these to some of the practical tasks of teaching. The major points that I hoped to bring out are grouped together below under five headings but it must be stressed that many of these points only emerged as we went along.

1. Teacher Power: the authority of the teacher and its effects upon learning; the teacher's control over virtually every aspect of a course; the dependency of students upon the teacher; the possible undesirable effects of over-preparation by the teacher and the limitations which this places upon students; the structure which a teacher imposes not only upon content but also upon the learning environment and the psychological consequences of this for students.

2. Individual Differences: the importance of recognizing (and responding to) the fact that each student brings to a class a different set of experiences, prior knowledge, expectations, aspirations, attitudes and interests, and will therefore respond differentially to events and experiences which are supposedly common to the whole group; the need to tolerate these differences in others and, if possible, make use of them; the interests and concerns of the teacher, and the ways in which these tend to structure classroom events, may not be shared by most of the students; the importance of tailoring assignments and private study to individual differences.

3. Student Role: drawing attention to the power of this and evidence of it within the group e.g. trying to find out what the teacher wants; identifying and meeting course requirements as opposed to personal learning needs; compliance and deference towards the teacher; expectation of structure; reluctance to take responsibility and initiative; concern and anxiety related to assessment.

4. Effects of the Learning Context: folklore about teachers and courses; demands on time made by other courses; assessment procedures and teaching styles in other courses; characteristics of the wider environment in which learning takes place.

5. Importance of the First Meeting: the initial meeting of a class tends to have a profound effect upon all subsequent meetings; first impressions of the teacher and other students; risk of misinterpretations; searching for clues as to what the course will be like; teacher giving a direction and setting a tone for the proceedings.

Research Aims not Directly Related to the Course

I intended to make use of the opportunity to teach this course in order to further some of my own research interests and the students were told of this, although not in any detail, before the course began. I was interested in two areas which have not been very much studied as far as higher education is concerned.

The first relates to the ways in which individual teachers plan their courses, monitor their progress and make use of feedback information. Another aspect of this is teacher anxiety: what management (and other) problems are they most concerned about before, during and after class? In order to seek information on these topics I intended to make use of several monitoring procedures not commonly used by teachers.

The second aim was to explore, by putting it to the test, the extent to which the "structure" of a course can be reduced without loss of educational value. How close can a teacher come to abdicating from his traditional role as planner, manager and didact by shifting responsibility for these activities onto the students? I have become increasingly convinced that teachers do too much work and that they learn more from courses than do students: this seems absurd since courses are supposedly for the benefit of students rather than teachers. I therefore intended to explore the extent to which a teacher can reduce his preparatory and didactic load without serious consequences for the students.

Teaching Method. There would be no lectures and classes would proceed by discussion with regular contributions by students on prepared topics of interest to them. I intended to use classroom events and draw upon individual and group experiences in order to make the kind of pedagogical points listed earlier: that was to comprise the real content of the course although it was clearly difficult, if not impossible, to disclose this at the beginning of the course. In this way I hoped to encourage the students to explore their own learning experiences in order to shed light on those of undergraduates and to modify their teaching accordingly. Also, I wished to encourage a reflective and introspective attitude towards teaching and learning, to experience a course with minimal structure (a novelty for most of those with medical training), to share the concerns of the teacher, to become aware of a variety of non-didactic teaching roles, and to develop a fuller understanding of why some things which are taught are remembered while the great majority are quickly forgotten.
An ambitious programme to cover in fourteen weeks!

Monitoring Procedures

I proposed to take advantage of the fact that I was the teacher and thus had complete access to all of my side of the story by arranging to be de-briefed by two of my colleagues immediately after each class. These sessions usually lasted for about thirty minutes and were tape-recorded. I spoke freely about whatever was at the front of my mind and they interspersed questions and comments to prod my memory and explore further those events which seemed to us significant. They were at a disadvantage in not having been present in the classroom but a great deal of useful information was retrieved in this way. Inevitably, these weekly sessions made me think much more deeply about what was happening, and what I was planning to do, and I gained a number of valuable insights as a result of these discussions.

This information was complemented by student relections on the events of each class, especially what these had meant to them in terms of their own learning. At the end of each session every student spent about five minutes completing a form (see Appendix I) which asked them to think back on what had taken place and comment upon it. I photocopied these and

handed back the originals. This yielded a great deal of interesting and valuable information, most of which I kept to myself but sometimes I commented upon it to the group at our next meeting.

I also kept brief notes on my planning activities prior to the course and of any other relevant ideas which had not been picked up during the de-briefing sessions. Three weeks before the end of the course I also distributed a document (see Appendix II) which attempted to summarize my own views and feelings about the course. The students were also asked to prepare a similar evaluative document but unfortunately most of them failed to do so. In writing this paper I have drawn upon all of these sources of data, but they have by no means been exhausted.

EVENTS PRIOR TO THE FIRST CLASS MEETING

In order to meet the requirements of the research project I was obliged to keep my planning and preparatory activities to a minimum and this proved to be more difficult than I had anticipated. I drew up the official course description and compiled a list of six books which were to be required reading for the course. There has been remarkably little research into adult learning and my serious reading in the area had stopped about fifteen years earlier so I could honestly claim to know very little about it. I nevertheless found it difficult not to keep an eye open for relevant items in the literature and was often tempted to make notes on some of the topics likely to be covered. Sometimes I had day-dreams (and night ones!) about the course, especially about how best to manage the first meeting and the likely responses of the students. No doubt I was experiencing some anxiety regarding my ability to pull the whole thing off.

About a week prior to the beginning of the semester there was meeting of all of the students and staff: this was primarily a social occasion but it was also an opportunity to sort out timetable difficulties and for each teacher to give a brief description of his course. said that I had no very clear idea what the course would be about and that we would develop it together as we went along. I also indicated that it would have some experimental aspects. The small amount of information disclosed at this meeting accurately reflected my very limited planning and preparation activities.

THE PROGRESS OF THE COURSE

During the first meeting I tried to develop a brief sketch of what the course would be about and again stressed that I did not know very much about the subject-matter and, further, that I did not intend to remedy this deficiency. I then introduced some simple Problem-solving games so that we could discuss the different ways in which individuals tackled them. This first meeting was clearly very important for the success of my approach and several of the student comments indicated that my initial disclaimers had not been accepted at their face value. They also revealed anxiety about lack of direction and a desire for more teacher activity.

----lack of structure and direction; too theoretical; discussion of semantics boring [this was quite a common complaint].

----disappointment that the teacher did not indicate what to expect from the course

----intrigued by lecturer's style: a bit like the magician whose act is to appear unprepared and lacking in skill but still manages to get the rabbits out of the hat on time.

----felt frustrated that I was not going to achieve anything substantial from this course because of the vagueness of the introduction, but the penny dropped and later I felt more enthusiastic.

----characteristics of some of us: some like it structured others do not.

----I felt the teacher was inventing a lack of preparation as an example in promoting dissatisfaction.

----I was wondering if you had really given the course much thought and my feelings were that you were filling in until next week when something concrete would develop. Later as the session became more animated I began to feel a warmer feeling but I would have been happier to have had some feedback on our own ideas.

My major concerns were: managing the first meeting successfully without arousing too much anxiety among the students; identifying and interpreting feedback signals during the class; discovering the students' interests as quickly as possible. An important point to make here, which only became clear to me very much later, is that the teacher is kept very busy in this type of teaching with the task of monitoring and managing the discussion: this can easily mislead him into supposing that the students are also very actively involved and engaged. In fact, of course,

they may feel that things are dragging along slowly. A videotape record can be useful in bringing this out.

I introduced further problem-solving activities the second week and there were requests for more directions on what to read and indications of a demand for more academic and theoretical content. I drew attention to the fact that many of the concerns and attitudes being expressed were little different from those commonly displayed by undergraduates. My major concern was with the difficulty of implementing my procedure for making pedagogical comments upon what was happening i.e. the problem of focussing attention upon the characteristics of what we were doing rather than upon what we were actually doing. Many students found it difficult to shift gear quickly enough to appreciate the points which I tried to make, and I was often reluctant to break into a vigorous discussion about content in order to make a comment which many might view as being quite irrelevant.

In the third week I again used games and simple problem-solving exercises to open up discussion of various aspects of learning and to encourage students to contribute their own ideas on the nature of learning. This produced many examples of individual differences in ability to tolerate what were viewed as irrelevant contributions.

---- satisfaction at successfully solving problem but frustration at wide-ranging discussion of irrelevant concepts: I want to get stuck into narrower field of exploration.

---- dismayed at what appeared to be narrower views of learning than my own.

---- sometimes frustrating because some people cannot see things which are pretty obvious to me.

---- frustrated at times by what I felt was irrelevant discussion.

---- too much time spent defining terms.

---- I now have a better idea of how this course is to develop. Inspired by today's session to read more about the learning process.

My major concern at this point was with the urgent need to arrange for the students to take over running the classes by contributing material, in pairs, on topics of interest to them. I began to feel increasingly anxious about my ability to continue running the classes without doing a good deal of preparatory work: once the students took over then the pressure would be off me and I would be able

to coast along for most of the remainder of the semester. A difficulty with this procedure is that students need time to identify their interests and prepare the necessary material to enable them to lead the discussion with some degree of confidence. Another difficulty is that the "housekeeping" tasks of planning the transfer of responsibility to students uses up a good deal of teaching and learning time and this can easily generate resentment. I was also concerned that the students may not have been doing much work out of class so I set a book review assignment. The results of this were not very satisfactory and consisted mainly of summaries.

In week four I felt a strong urge to attempt to pull some of the earlier discussions together in a more systematic manner so I gave a short lecture which attempted to define "learning" by distinguishing it from a number of other related concepts. This produced a variety of interesting responses.

---- Important for the group to agree on a definition of learning. I became more involved in this session than previous one's although I did not contribute. Also feel that this group will mature and be more productive in future.

---- I felt good about the whole session in that we explored people's ideas and allowed free discussion of these.

---- Too much time discussing definitions: need more intervention and explanation by the teacher to make atmosphere of the class more orderly.

---- I understood better some aspects of conducting group discussion. Felt impatient because I feel we are standing still because I feel I have worked through these conceptual areas already. Not as good a session as some that have gone before: not productive for me.

---- I am enjoying the course very much, perhaps more than any other educational activity I have so far taken part in.

---- This session primarily of intellectual interest to me. We all seem to have moderately well-entrenched views.

---- People talk for the sake of talking, often about things that are obvious.

---- Lectures can be really boring.

---- The discussion today was very fruitful and time was most usefully spent.

---- I enjoyed the session as everybody contributed reasonably effectively.

---- I appreciated the lecture even though this is a master's course, because it gave me more ammunition and food for thought.

The lecture was not very well received, partly because I had set up an expectation that I would not give any lectures and partly because it was poorly structured, but at least it served the purpose of stimulating a very lively discussion. It seems likely that well-structured presentations block discussion because they leave no loose ends for students to seize upon. They also impose the teacher's structure upon the material and this may leave no psychological space in which students can manoeuvre.

I was determined to hand over to the students after this session so a good deal of time was spent in allocating responsibility for topics and determining the order of presentation. Once this had been achieved I felt that I could relax and let them make the running.

For the next few weeks pairs of students introduced a topic which provided material for discussion. The following are typical comments on one of these sessions.

---- impressed by the work which went into the presentation.

---- challenged my previous ideas rather than taught me anything.

---- time wasted in trying to decide what to do next week. Concerned by one person "rubbishing" the contribution of another.

---- A very structured and frustrating session because the two leaders insisted on sticking to their prepared material and did not encourage free thought.

---- felt that the presenters did not seem to understand some of the theories they were discussing.

---- felt relaxed and enjoyed it all. Pity there was no time to complete what we wanted to do. [A presenter] .

---- Interest and appreciation of the way the teacher involved one of the group in the discussion: a powerful piece of teaching.

---- I became confused when the presenter lectures and when he or she is also confused i.e. when there is no discussion. I was angry at being lectured to and felt rejected and unfulfilled. It was a great try but I did not enjoy the session.

I felt that most of the presentations were of mediocre quality and became increasingly concerned about the lack of background which they revealed and wondered whether I should have attempted to boost some of this, even though this would have required a good deal of reading on my part. I needed to constantly remind myself that the course was not really about the content of what was being presented. Most of the students seemed reasonably satisfied, perhaps because they felt that they were being supplied with some fairly solid material each week. They will forget almost all of it within a few days: what is needed is one or two important ideas or questions which will stick, but how best to introduce or elicit these without the padding of a mini-lecture? This was perhaps one of the central problems of the course, and possibly of all teaching. How much drizzle do we need before something grows?

I continued to make pedagogic observations and comments as opportunity offered but increasingly felt that I was not doing enough of this considering the central place I had allocated to it. My reluctance to intervene stemmed from a growing conviction of the dangers involved, especially that of diverting the discussion towards the interests of the teacher when these may not be shared by the group. Students tend to fall in to line, overtly anyway, if a teacher systematically develops a point or topic and this stops them from struggling with their own ideas and forces them to begin grappling with those of the teacher.

The course was almost half over and I was also concerned with the problem of how to increase the involvement of two members of the group one of whom had not spoken at all while the other had only contributed a couple of remarks. Others had also expressed concern about this.

A very significant event occurred in week six: unable to inform the students that I had influenze I simply failed to appear. The meeting went ahead but the following week I was unable to find out very much about what had happened except that the group had experienced some kind of crisis centred around the tendency of the Australian students to monopolize the discussions. Several people doubted my explanation of my absence and suspected that I had deliberately stayed away: this reinforced my view of the importance of the first meeting when it seemed that I had unintentionally given the impression that what I said was not be taken at its face value. It is also of interest that the only meeting at which the silent student contributed to discussion was the one from which I was absent.

At this time I became increasingly concerned with the issue of assessment. I had raised this early in the course but as it failed to provoke much interest I did not press it further, so in week eight I expressed my concerns at some length and said that I felt it was important for everyone to produce a major piece of written work. Several students were bothered by my signs of anxiety and said they were willing to help me out by writing something, although one said later that he suspected that this was another pedagogic move on my part. A major difference between this group and an undergraduate class was that they genuinely did not seem to be bothered by the assessment issue and were rather puzzled that I should be worrying about it. This was a relief to me but it made it difficult to discuss the effects of assessment procedures upon learning.

By week eight I began to feel an increasing pressure, from myself, to introduce more material and began to worry about how much they were really learning despite the fact that most of them seemed fairly happy with the way things were going. I felt only marginally in control of the situation and remained convinced that many of the students had not really grasped what the course was all about. By week eleven I felt that it was imperative that I write down my own views on where we were. There were clear signs, I thought, that the course was now running downhill and losing its grip on the students: perhaps they felt that they had already gained all they were likely to get from it. I felt anxious about the course disintegrating without some of my major objectives being achieved so I wrote the document which appears as Appendix II and distributed it the following week. This was read with great interest but

provoked less discussion than I had hoped: several people said that they needed time to think about it.

A major problem at this point was that there were still three weeks to go after we had heard the final student presentation and I was unsure about what to do with this time. I was still very much a victim of the teacher's role in that I failed to end the course a week early with general discussion of our individual evaluations of the course. Like most of the students in their presentations I also felt that we should fill in time and cover the ground even though there was really nothing of value left for us to do.

WHAT WAS LEARNT BY THE STUDENTS?

It is not easy to answer this question because, unfortunately, I failed to require the students to provide a detailed written account of what they had gained from the course: the two accounts which were completed have been included as Appendix III. Another student wrote comments on my own document and I shall summarize those here. He did not share my feeling that some of the major aims of the course had not been adequately realized: "I may be misleading myself but I cannot see what is yet to be realized and do greatly value what has already gone so far." He also commented: "We are all annoyed by an approach the opposite of yours." He summed up what he had gained as follows: "The ultimate benefit of this course (for me) will only emerge in time as I cope (or try to) with the difficulties of 'teaching' my students attitudes and interpersonal skills. I am sure now that there are real benefits to come."

Apart from the feedback from the 'reflections' each week, which I interpreted as being reasonably encouraging, three people told me during coffee breaks that they felt that the course had changed them in important ways, although they did not go into any details. More recently I have picked up three comments from other students familiar with the "folklore" about courses and teachers: "a 'thinking' course"; "confused but interesting"; "hopeless". Teachers can re-assure themselves with the knowledge that it is impossible to please everyone!

WHAT WAS LEARNT BY THE TEACHER?

I am convinced that, despite my best efforts to avoid it happening, I learnt more from this course than the students and I still believe this to be an absurd and undesirable outcome of any course although I am not at all clear about what I ought to have done to avoid it. It should be obvious from what has been said earlier that I gained many valuable insights into my own teaching style and the effects which this has upon students, as well as improving my own skills in managing a course of this type even though I have a great deal yet to learn -- especially about the timing and nature of teacher interventions in discussion group activities.

I feel that I demonstrated the educational viability of a course in which teacher preparation is kept to a minimum and which is not highly structured either in form or content. What structure there was lay in the teaching method rather than the content: what matters educationally is the way in which courses are handled rather than in what they overtly set out to teach. From the viewpoint of the student it is the teacher's structuring of the way in which both process and content are approached and handled that constitutes the most formidable obstacle to significant learning -- a point which has been repeatedly stressed by Carl Rogers for many years.

I also demonstrated, I think, that courses can work quite well without aims and objectives being made very explicit and even without them being more than vaguely entertained by both teacher and students at the beginning of a course. Allied to this is the suspicion that what seems of crucial significance as far as long-term learning is concerned is what comes across of the personality and characteristics of the teacher i.e. what students recall about particular courses is often strongly related to the non-content contributions made by the teacher. If this is so then it is of great educational importance and merits detailed investigation.

If one adopts the role of teacher rather than the essentially neutral one of facilitator then this imposes limits upon the extent to

which one can abdicate responsibility for learning. If there are certain things that one wishes students to learn then one has an obligation to take whatever steps are appropriate to ensure, as far as this is possible, that this learning does take place. To insist on shifting all of the responsibility onto the students is to give up the very idea of teaching. How far one can go in this direction is still very unclear to me.

Finally, I am convinced that teachers can learn a great deal from a course of this type in which they are encouraged to explore both their own learning experiences and the problems faced by the teacher in trying to make plain the significance of these for their own professional work.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my colleagues, Margot Pearson and Denis Kelly, for helping me to articulate my own thoughts and feelings and for making many insightful comments. It goes without saying that I am very greatly indebted to the students for being so patient with my ideosyncrasies and for sharing their experiences of learning with me.

APPENDIX I.

IMMEDIATE REFLECTIONS ON 40.101G: LEARNING AND TEACHING.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Topic(s) Discussed:

Practical Work:

What significant things do you feel you learnt or understood better as a result of today's session?

Are there any areas which you would like to explore more fully?

Were there any areas which you consider were of little or no value?

Did you react emotionally to anything in this session? If so, try to indicate possible explanations for your response.

Indicate briefly the possible applications to your own professional work of what was done today.

Any other comments?

APPENDIX II.

A VIEW OF THE COURSE CALLED "LEARNING AND TEACHING"

John Powell

Note: This is very much a draft: a first, second and n^{th} impression. Perhaps it will never be developed into anything else, and that would be unfortunate. At some point we have to consider how we can make available to others (and to ourselves) what we have learnt, found out, tripped over, discovered or otherwise come by. One obvious method would be for everyone to write comments upon this document so that we can then, as a group, negotiate something of value which we can make public.

1. It might make things easier to discuss if I number the paragraphs although this does not indicate that I have any structure for what I wish to say. These are just my reflections on what has taken place, jotted down three weeks before our final meeting. I am hoping, though, that they may provide a basis for our discussions for the remainder of the course. Teachers and students find it difficult to interest themselves in a course once it has ended just as novelists are usually only interested in talking about their next novel rather than their earlier work. It has released its psychological grip on them.

2. I feel a need to make many things more explicit since the main value of this course has yet to be realized: if I fail to do this during the next three meetings then a great deal of importance will not be achieved. This is the responsibility of the teacher and I somehow have to pull this off in the time remaining to us, although I am not at all clear as to how this should be done. Perhaps it requires far more skill than I can muster.

3. I feel that I have gained more from this course than anyone else in the group, and this concerns me a little although it may not be such a bad thing. It is, however, inconsistent with my belief that courses are for the benefit of the students rather than the teachers. It is not an easy matter to outline what I have gained but perhaps that will become clearer as I go along. I agreed to teach this course very reluctantly yet it has provided insights and experiences of the greatest value to me as a teacher and as a researcher into some of the problems of higher education.

4. I agreed to teach the course mainly because I thought that it would provide an opportunity to try out some of my own theories about how teaching and learning should proceed. In particular, I wanted to explore two things: (a) the extent to which responsibility for the structuring of a course could be abdicated by the teacher and (b) the nature of what could be learnt from a course which although ostensible about one body of subject-matter was in reality dealing with something rather different.

5. At the meeting in which each of the courses was briefly 'advertised' I tried to make it clear that I did not really know what the course would be about, and I tried to make this even clearer during our first meeting. What I said was, in general, not believed and was interpreted as a rather subtle pedagogical move on my part. Perhaps I should not have been suprised by this. Even now I am uncertain about the extent to which

my claims were true. I did, however, try to stick by my principles: no course outline was prepared (except to satisfy University requirements), I did not do any reading or undertake any preparation for any of the meetings. The temptation to engage in preparation was very strong, especially before the course began and on at least two occasions I caught myself making notes and drafting plans for the course. These I promptly tore up and I was not further tempted after the first week.

6. We know from other evidence that the first meeting between teacher and students is of crucial importance in setting the tone and scene for an entire course. It soon became clear that this was certainly the case with us. During our first meeting I had unintentionally established the belief that what I said was not to be taken at its face value: my assertions about the nature of the course were not accepted and when I subsequently missed a meeting because of influenza several people interpreted this as a pedagogical move and obviously doubted my explanation. Similarly, when I later said that I was anxious about the assessment and assignment situation someone asked whether I really <u>was</u> anxious. This drives home to us the significance of the first encounter and the difficulties encountered by students when the teacher adopts an unfamiliar stance. I have learnt a great deal from this, even though I knew about it 'in theory'.

7. I have also learnt a great deal about individual variation in response to teaching. We know a lot about this, of course, but I was staggered by some of the comments in the 'reflections'. After what we might take to have been a common experience for the group one member wrote that the session had been one of the most vital educational experiences in his career while another claimed that it had been largely a waste of time! Such differences in response pose an almost insoluble problem for both teachers and learners and the scope of it would not have been so obvious to me had I not had access to everyone's 'reflections'. Most of our teaching ignores it and assumes that learner-uptake is fairly even, and most university teachers are protected from grappling with its implications by absence of feedback. I also have the impression that many members of the group tend to be rather intolerant of the needs of other members in this regard: they consider mainly what they are gaining from the meetings and find it difficult to appreciate that others may have very different needs because of their past experience and the manner in which the topic under discussion currently presents itself to them. It is obviously very difficult to make allowance for this and to be both tolerant and patient. Also, there must presumably be some limit to the amount of scope one can allow to individuals. This solution to this is still not clear to me.

8. During the course I have had many long periods of reflection about the direction in which we have been moving and events during the meetings. Several times these have given rise to very strong

feelings, sometimes to experiencing quite powerful emotions -- especially that of affection for everyone in the group. I am not sure why this should be. Partly because I feel responsible, in a very personal way, for what we are doing, partly because I feel that we sometimes achieve, together and individually, valuable insights, and partly because I feel that everyone is very tolerant of my somewhat eccentric approach. Tolerant in a vaguely protective kind of way. It is very hard to pin this down, but as a result of it I respond by feeling a strong attachment, of an emotional nature, to the group and shall be sorry when we break up. I know that this is not an uncommon experience when working with small groups but it is not often, unfortunately, experienced by teachers. Its educational significance lies in its causal connection with the nature of what is learnt, and this is still very poorly understood.

9. What this course is really all about has only gradually become clear to me as our meetings have progressed. At the beginning when I said that I was unsure as to the content of the course, someone remarked that he was not worried about this because he was quite happy to wait until the end of our journey and then look around before deciding whether that was a destination worth reaching. This was a very perceptive remark and it re-assured me greatly when I had doubts about what we were doing. The course was supposed to be about 'learning' and in the initial description of the course content I listed a few of the standard topics that would ordinarily be dealt with in such a course. We have, in fact, discussed some of these. But it

gradually became clear to me that the course was not really about such topics but about a variety of other things--many of them related to the original topics. This raises the question of the relevance of standard accounts of 'objectives' to what we have been doing.

10. My method has mainly been that of using the events and content of our meetings to make pedagogical points, but I am not sure of the extent to which this has been appreciated. I have tried to restrict my contributions so that they fit within this framework. In other words, I have tried to use what we do and say to illustrate particular educational principles. This is very difficult to do successfully because everyone finds it hard to move rapidly from one level of thinking to another, to step outside the immediate situation and view it from a completely different angle. My impression is that I have largely failed to achieve my aims in this area: hence this document, and the crucial significance of our remaining meetings.

11. As to what the course is really about I suppose I must say, and this sounds rather trite, that it is about gaining insights and deepening our understanding, at a personal and individual level, of some of the factors involved in adult learning and tracing the implications of these for teaching. This sounds very ambitious when we only have fourteen meetings and I can only hope that by the end of the session the amount I have gained is not too excessive in terms of what everyone else has gained. It would have been very easy for me to have read up a lot of

material on learning, delivered fifteen lectures, ensured everyone else did a fair amount of reading and writing, and to have hoped that we all 'learnt' something about learning. But that would have closed-off a lot of opportunities for learning rather different things and it was those things that I felt this course should be about. Only the other members of the group can know the extent to which these other opportunities have been realised.

12. I have the impression that very little reading has been done: if so, this may be related to my not doing any. Is it a bad thing? Another important lesson for me has been appreciating the foolishness of equating learning with the amount of time and effort expended. This was driven home to me when we were discussing assignments and someone said that if they wrote something then it might be only in order to satisfy requirements: they could learn as much (or much more) from what we did during our meetings as they could from anything they did outside of them. I think I must agree with this.

13. This has forced me to change my ideas as I have been unable to invent a convincing reply to it. As a result the situation with respect to assignments has been left more than somewhat vague. I know that some people are working on something and if they feel that it will produce something significant for them then I shall be more than happy. On the other hand, others may not be working on anything because they feel that it would be mere 'busy-work' in order to satisfy the course requirements. Again, I am quite happy about that. But others may not be because it does raise a question of justice and the more general question of assessment. After all, this is a higher

degree course and presumably there are some requirements which have to be met.

14. We did once discuss the issue of assessment but nobody seemed to want to discuss it at any length. It is important, however, for my purposes because it provides an opportunity to consider issues of great significance to students. I did consider, at one point, manipulating the situation with this in mind i.e. generating some anxiety so that we could discuss its implications for learning generally. I decided against that because my own ideas are still confused. Assessment and assignments are also significant in relation to the interaction between courses, that is, the differential demands made by courses and the responses of students to these. I am extremely interested in this problem but it is not an easy one to raise without involving comments on other teachers. There is, of course, a folklore on this to which all students have easy access.

15. I have been very impressed by the educational effects of role adoption by teachers and students. Maybe group members still suppose that I am an expert on learning even though I have said (truthfully!) that I know very little about the subject. I am looked to for authoritative comment. My opinions are deferred to by other members of the group. If I intervene in the discussion then there is a likelihood that it will diverge along lines that interest me -- even though these may not be of concern to more than one or two others. People ring me up to seek approval for a seminar or assignment topic. Throughout the course I have been commenting

on the similarity between us and undergraduates in all of these respects. Last week, for the first time, nobody paid much attention to what I said and my interventions were largely ignored: I interpreted this as a major sign of success in that it indicated an ability and willingness to be independent of authority figures. There is a tremendously important lession here: if it took us so long to reach this point then how much more difficult must it be for undergraduates? They are the victims of their teachers: directed, threatened, structured, restricted and almost totally dependent. How can we establish a situation in which these constraints are absent yet where significant learning still takes place?

16. Motivation. We discussed this topic last week but not in relation to ourselves. I have very little knowledge of why people are doing this course. This question was raised briefly some time back but skated over pretty swiftly. Since we agreed last week that motivation was very important as far as learning is concerned it might help to look more closely at our own motives.

17. This leads to another very important area which was touched upon during the general course review meeting recently, namely, have we developed an atmosphere within which we can speak reasonably frankly without offending and disturbing one another? I think not. Some of the written comments would be put very differently if they were made verbally. Probably we all feel that we have not adequately coped with the 'veterans' and 'newcomers' problem which someone identified right at the beginning of the course. Everyone feels guilty at failing to

involve one of the group more closely in our activities. We all appreciate the dangers of talking too much yet have great difficulty in keeping quiet.

18. One thing that has really suprised me is the very small number of initiatives that have come from within the group. The way was wide open for suggestions as to where we should go and what we should do yet this opportunity has never been taken up: despite frequent disclaimers on my part, I have been firmly in control throughout. There may have been mutterings of discontent in the corridor but almost no expressions of hostility or attempts to set goals during our meetings. I would certainly have expected much more of the latter. Maybe everyone felt that they knew so little about the proclaimed subject area that they were reluctant to come forward with suggestions. Or perhaps I unwittingly conveyed during the first meeting a strong sense of direction even though I refused to disclose its details. Whatever the explanation, this is a very interesting area. Our own experience suggests that undergraduates will experience great difficulties if faced with a genuinely open-ended learning situation.

APPENDIX III.

EVALUATION OF COURSE LEARNING AND TEACHING.

VALUES AND GOALS. This course was specifically unstructured without an episodic curriculum, doing away with the passivity of so called Education where the emphasis is upon gaining and storing information in the form in which it was presented. There was no cook-book ever presented on any strand of this course. Effort was put into finding processes of putting information together and finding out what was generic about it. Each member of this group had to discover their own values and goals of this course.

There was no attempt made to normalize the diverging standards and cultural differences in the group. Learning on this course could only be achieved if the members followed the precept "we learn best by doing and by having a vital interest in what we are doing". Also necessary was that "learning is a continuous reconstruction of living experience that goes beyond the four walls of the classroom".

> What were my values and goals. It took me well into the course before I could decide what specifically were my goals. They now are (1) To develop a clear understanding of the ways in which people learn (2) To be able to design effective learning experiences for students with variable learning patterns.
>
> I placed great values on the thoughts, dissentions and advice offered by the members of the group and Dr. John Powell. I have valued the uncertainty that sometimes crept into the discussions as it improved my ability to generate and handle uncertainty and therefore be able to solve problems creatively.
>
> I valued John Powell's attitude as it did break down the existence of teacher prejudice. As he did not present himself as the highly intellectual authority figure, I think it did free the way to freer discussion and for the acceptance of some of the thoughts brought forward.

CHANGES AND ADJUSTMENT. Some changes were made towards the latter half of the course to adjust to the needs of the overseas students, but this was perhaps a bit too late. More positive channeling of the

discussion, and some in depth content added to the discussion would have been welcome. I felt too much reliance on members to give information was made. There was some diagnosis made from time to time on the progress of the class, but prognosis was somewhat inadequate at times, as discussion only took part with a minority of the group. Members often dissociated themselves from the topic. Nevertheless learning did take place with every session, some more some less.

WHAT BEHAVIOUR PATTERNS ARE FOLLOWED BY GOOD TEACHERS.

1. Willingness to be flexible, to be direct or indirect as the situations demand.
2. They seem to have more positive views of others: students, colleagues.
3. They favour democratic classroom procedures.
4. The ability to see things from the other person's point of view.
5. They do not look at students as persons "you do something to" but rather as individuals capable of doing for themselves once they feel trusted, respected and valued.
6. The teacher genuinely cares for the students and expresses his feelings.
7. Provides definite study helps.
8. Assumes a conversational manner in teaching.

John Powell did follow the above patterns, and I do not think members were intolerant of his attitude but were uncertain of its intent, and this in itself was an exercise to solve uncertainty.

Cognitive knowledge on educational principles of learning can always be obtained from text books; much more valuable is the relevance of the principles to one's own educational environment.

Constructive discussion producing generic learning, which permits us to cross the barrier into thinking. It matters not what we have learned but what we can do with what we have learned.

Let us be judged on what we can generate, than what we know.

This course has positively identified in me the urge to generate change in my teaching methods - to foster a better learning system for my students. This is the most valuable contribution to one who has taught for fifteen years non-stop.

A PERSONAL VIEWPOINT OF TEACHING AND LEARNING COURSE.

1. Opening Sessions. I had no idea what the course was about before the first session, and just as much after the first session, but it was clear that everyone else was in the same state, and I felt little anxiety about it.

   I brought concepts of my own - ideas of the way in which I could (and had) approached the topic, and felt some need to compare this viewpoint with those of the rest of the group.

   During the first two or three sessions I had a variety of internal responses; anger at John Powell when he interrupted what was the beginning of some developing discussion which was going somewhere for me to do a lot of talking of his own which not only altered the direction but sometimes was irrelevant for me; pleasure when John Powell interrupted or joined in the discussion to guide it back to relevancy.

   Mostly in retrospect there was pleasure when he asked me to look at something and gave the chance of discussion and opportunity and displeasure when he asked me to look at something and described it in detail without giving me the opportunity to talk about it.

2. The late sessions in which we were encouraged to conduct a session each were valuable to me - being on both sides of the fence (teacher/learner) with the same people in the same sessions brought an intensified consciousness of the things which were productive or not in both situations.

   Major learning from this area included a consciousness of how much can be dealt with in the time available as a teacher and that in order to learn, I must be able to participate.

3. The dawning of many understandings have flowed from all the sessions: of how the teacher's non-verbal communication effects the learners, of how the emotions and inter-relationships between teacher-learner and learner-learners can foster or discourage learning, of a view on learning as opposed to integration of knowledge (learning vis a vis education). The understandings are neither complete nor simple and I find them continually affecting all the facets of my life and knowledge as I continue to reflect on them.

4. The freedom of worry about a summative assessment on the course and relief of anxiety about passing or failing was a major contribution to learning for me. To be able to undertake the major assignment out of concern for John Powell's needs rather than from a need to pass or fail made a difference to the sort of effort that went into it. I am sure it added to the quality of the work, because it became an assessment of me by myself - and I was not satisfied with it when completed, where I suspect an external examiner could have been.

5. In summary I feel that I have learned the following.

   a) Learning is a bushfire which needs the spark and the wind to set it off.

   b) Learning experiences are the sparks, the joy of discovery is the wind.

   c) If a learner leaves a session with one question (at least) in his head which he has formulated, the spark is producing fire.

   d) The greatest "tinder bed" for the spark of learning is set by a bond of interpersonal concern between teacher and learner, and the greater that bond and understanding, the greater the mutual desire to give of quality, the more inflammable the learning situation.

e) It is difficult to assess with any degree of accuracy or comprehension the total ramifications of any learning.

f) All parts of learning - cognitive, affective and psychomotor- are important, but the most uncertain and difficult, therefore the most important is probably the affective.

g) It is likely that the amount of learning varies directly with the interpersonal closeness of teacher and learner and by inference, most learning (quantitatively as well as qualitatively) takes place with people who are interpersonally closest. A hypothetical concept which I aim to explore more deeply. I leave the course with sadness, warmth, hope and many self-formulated questions which demand answers of me.